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President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 106

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family: follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/268)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.6)

The President: Members will recall that the Assembly, pursuant to resolution 52/80 of 12 December 1997, decided at its 3rd plenary meeting on 17 September 1999 to devote four plenary meetings on Monday and Tuesday, 4 and 5 October 1999, to the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons. I welcome to the United Nations those of you who have come to this important meeting from different parts of the world, and I wish you all a pleasant stay in New York.

The theme of the International Year of Older Persons, "A society for all ages", is founded on the basic idea of inclusiveness, which should inform the human relations, family cohesion and social development that strengthen the society. In this sense, the theme of ageing links us to an early period of the evolution of society and community interdependence when older persons were revered for their wisdom and as repositories of traditions, customs and past achievements. This is, indeed, a welcome sign of a return to our roots and humanity.

For these reasons, the presence in this Hall of so many senior Government representatives and other elderly and esteemed participants coming from their capitals demonstrates the importance which Member States attach to the issue of ageing of persons and populations.

Questions relating to ageing have been on the United Nations agenda since as far back as 1948. The noble ideals and objectives enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights enjoin us to strive towards creating and maintaining human societies based on family values of loving and caring among all members of the family. Elders, parents, youth and children are all linked together through reciprocal relationships which continuously enrich their common heritage.

It was not, however, until the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Ageing by the World Assembly on Ageing, held in Vienna in 1982, that States and civil society started adopting public policy and other concrete measures to deal with ageing. This Plan of Action is now the central policy document of United Nations discussions and activities on ageing.

The United Nations General Assembly has taken significant steps since the World Assembly on Ageing to underscore the importance which Member States attach to the issue of ageing. These steps include: the designation, in 1990, of 1 October as the International Day of Older Persons; the adoption, in 1991, of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons; and, in

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1992, the agreement on the global targets on ageing for the year 2001. In addition, in 1992, the General Assembly proclaimed 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons.

In the 1992 Proclamation on Ageing, the Assembly urged the international community to give generous support to national initiatives on ageing, consistent with national cultures and social conditions in relevant countries. Thus it is encouraging to see that in the course of this year, focal points have been established in more than 100 Member States. This clearly indicates that more and more nations are recognizing a significant increase in the population of their older citizens, who are now living longer. Perhaps more importantly, there is growing awareness of the extraordinary speed with which these numbers will grow in the years to come, sooner rather than later. These facts, I believe, have major implications for our thinking, attitudes and commitment and the public policy of nations.

The Secretary-General points out in his report entitled "International Year of Older Persons, 1999: activities and legacies" that legislative initiatives have been undertaken or reinforced and strategies to deal with ageing put in place by some Member States. While these efforts are forward looking, more concrete actions need to be taken.

The central theme of the International Year of Older Persons has drawn its inspiration from the World Summit for Social Development, held in March 1995 in Copenhagen. Since the Year's theme was first introduced in the Secretary-General's report of 1995 (A/50/114), its core ideas have been developed to the point where it is now possible to suggest a model for the development of a policy framework on ageing. This model aims to present a new view and a new way of assessing ageing of individuals and populations in a more holistic way. Surely, this is the best approach.

I am confident that over the next two days the debate will be characterized by new ideas and a renewed commitment to the Proclamation on Ageing, which calls for the recognition of humanity's demographic coming of age and the promise it holds for maturing attitudes and innovations in political, legal, social, economic, cultural and spiritual fields as our collective and determined way of preparing ourselves towards social justice, global peace, human development equality in the next century. "A society for all ages" is a solemn exhortation directed at us all for an enlightened and goal-oriented debate on the challenges and opportunities that it conveys.

I now call on the Deputy Secretary-General.

The Deputy Secretary-General: I am very happy to be with you today as you gather to discuss the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons. When he launched this International Year last October, the Secretary-General said we were in the midst of a silent revolution. I am pleased to say that the silence has been broken.

Throughout the Year, 99 national committees and innumerable other actors from all sectors — Governments, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and the corporate world, not to mention the United Nations family — convened conferences, organized campaigns, launched studies, held cultural events and created Internet pages, all in pursuit of one goal: highlighting the issue of ageing and raising awareness of the implications of the demographic revolution for individuals and societies all over the world. I would say that together they have done excellent work.

Although it was not news to anyone that our societies are ageing, it was necessary to put some basic facts into sharper focus. Globally, 1 out of every 10 persons is age 60 or over. By 2020, the corresponding figure will be one out of every eight persons, and by 2150, every third person will be over 60.

Although statistics are often said to hide more than they reveal, these are, by any standards, startling numbers. They show beyond any doubt that, even if all other things remain equal, families, communities and societies will be dramatically different a century from now. And since we don't know very much else about what tomorrow's world will look like, it would indeed be foolish not to prepare for one of the transformations we do know we will have to face.

Another important fact the Year has brought to light is that although Europe is projected to remain the major area of the world affected by ageing, future changes will be more dramatic in the less developed countries. Moreover, these regions will be facing the ageing factor at the same time as they face a large increase in their total population, as well as the ongoing challenge of development. So their strategies will have to be tailored accordingly. When it comes to ageing policies, one size does not fit all.

Developed countries will mainly have to address the special needs of the growing number of very old people

in their populations and to examine the appropriateness of current retirement policies and practices, income security provisions and pension schemes. Less developed countries will have to focus more on the link between ageing and development: the eradication of poverty in older populations, support for families, health care, and human and institutional capacities to address the needs of older people.

The Year also helped put the ageing revolution in a more positive perspective. Extending life expectancy is, we have been reminded, something humanity has always striven for; achieving it is truly one of the greatest successes of this century. With it naturally comes the ageing of societies. Like all structural changes, this poses a challenge. As long as we do not cling to outdated ideas and habits, this challenge can be a great opportunity.

Of course, this will only be possible if the older generations participate fully in the life of their communities and countries. They have to be given the means to do so. As the International Plan of Action on Ageing said as long ago as 1982, in paragraph 32:

> "the transition to a positive, active and developmentally oriented view of aging may well result from action by elderly people themselves, through the sheer force of their growing number and influence."

This is an appealing idea. But we should not take it to indicate that everything will just fall into place once there are enough older people around. A lot of planning can be done, and must be done, for ageing to become a positive force.

(spoke in French)

The International Year has helped us to become aware of the fact that, throughout the twentieth century policies concerning older persons were drawn up in the context of young societies. Henceforth, it is with ageing societies in mind that we need to tailor our policies, that we need to formulate all our policies, including those concerning other age groups.

Having collectively realized our dream of a longer life expectancy, we now need to adapt to it. On the level of policies, infrastructures and distribution of resources, Governments will need to seek the means to meet varying aspirations and needs.

Financial security and the health of older persons naturally remain a key concern. Our thinking should go much further, however, to include questions such as continued training, the promotion of healthy life styles from early in life, extended families, relations between generations, the status of women, labour policies and the link between ageing and socio-economic development. In all these spheres, investments made today will avoid considerable imbalances and dependencies later on, both for the individual and for ageing societies. I would go further: if these policies are carefully thought out, they will allow for the transformation of what could otherwise become a burden into a valuable source of human, social and economic capital.

Well thought out investments assume concerted and planned action, rather than timely intervention. The question of ageing, with its numerous and extremely complex ramifications, has to be examined in the broadest context possible. In other words, the way to confront it seriously is to make it an integral part of all economic and social development programmes, whether local, national or international.

The United Nations, for its part, is determined to play its part so that the International Year may continue to bear fruit. As the Assembly knows, we have launched long-term initiatives, such as the Research Agenda on Ageing for the Twenty-first Century and a data bank on national policies and programmes, accessible on the Internet. I invite all States Members to actively support these projects and benefit from them. And I thank all those who have already made a generous financial contribution.

The International Year of Older Persons is not an end in itself, but a springboard. Like all springboards, it can change a resolute impulse into a great leap forward. It can give us the necessary impetus to create a richer and more mature society in the next century, relying on the participation of each individual and meeting the needs of all its members, no matter what their age. Let us not lose this opportunity.

I wish the Assembly success in its work.

The President: Before calling on the first speaker on the list, I should like to recall that a note verbale dated 3 September 1999 was transmitted to permanent missions, with the suggestion that statements at these four plenary meetings should not exceed 10 minutes.

In view of the large number of speakers on the list, it would be appreciated if speakers adhered to the 10-minute guideline.

Ms. Perho (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries, Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) country, member of the European Economic Area (EEA), Liechtenstein, have expressed their wish to align themselves with this statement.

The International Year of Older Persons is soon coming to its end. However, the end of the Year should be seen also as a start, and as an opportunity to carry forward the legacy of the Year. As the Secretary-General so rightly states in his report (A/54/268), the activities of the Year, organized all over the world, have brought to the Year a global relevance that will sustain and move "A society for all ages" into the new millennium.

Older persons have a crucial role to play in the development process: they should be seen as active participants at all levels and in all activities of societies, not as dependants. The objective of any policy on ageing should be to promote older persons' well-being and their ability to cope as independently as possible, and to improve and promote the care they receive. Equality, the right to self-determination, economic independence and security are fundamental values underlying such a policy. A holistic, multi-sectoral policy on ageing must encompass all the central dimensions of life in society: working life and livelihood; health and functional capacity; the home and the everyday environment; education and culture; social welfare and health care; and social interaction and participation. Policies on ageing should also foster dialogue and solidarity between generations.

Globally, population ageing is a common phenomenon. Its impact on society, however, must be seen as closely linked to country- or region-specific situations where economic, social, cultural and other factors may vary greatly. The pace of growth in the number of older persons is faster than anticipated, posing new challenges to societies all over the world.

The European Union earlier this year released a communication entitled "Towards a Europe for All Ages — Promoting Prosperity and Intergenerational Solidarity". This communication, from the Commission of the European Communities, was seen as necessary mainly because of the rapid changes in population structures in the European Union countries, one manifestation of which is increasing life expectancy.

Increasing life expectancy is a result of successful social and health policies and improved overall living standards and general well-being. However, in ageing societies such as those in Europe one of the concerns is how national economies will be able to meet the challenge of growing pensions costs. There are various reform initiatives under discussion which aim to prolong active participation by the ageing population in working life. There is also a need to identify new forms of labour that would take ageing workers' needs into account: these new forms include such measures as developing various part-time work or part-time retirement schemes.

The majority of today's retiring people are healthy and active citizens who do not need any targeted social services for older persons. The researchers describe this phenomenon as "the third age" — following childhood/youth and active working life — the age when an individual is still healthy, active and financially independent.

In Europe the number of people in the oldest age bracket, 80 and above, is growing. Many European countries face the challenge of meeting the needs of this population group. Even for this age group, the objective is to design policies and services that enable them to live lives that are as independent as possible. Their daily physical and mental environment should be "older people friendly", and they should have access to social and health care services that meet their needs. The importance of these factors as they affect older people's lives was of course set out in the 1982 Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing.

The policy on ageing in my own country follows very much those lines. Finland is among those European Union countries whose population is ageing fastest. Our policy on ageing has been mostly Government and municipal policy, with clear emphasis on social welfare and health policy. To an increasing degree, however, weight is being given to the importance of civil society, including non-governmental organizations and private-sector actors. Our objective is an active old age, giving older people equal right to participate and to learn.

The human rights of older people require special attention. The issue of ageing women is part of the general issue of the advancement of women and cannot be dealt with in isolation. Older women make a significant contribution to development; policies and strategies must be designed that support their active participation and guarantee them equal rights in any society. In Europe, according to a recent report from the European Commission entitled "Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Union 1998", the ageing of Europe is the ageing of older women.

The States Members of the United Nations report every four years to the Organization on issues of ageing. There have been, however, some problems with this reporting, such as a lack of responses from Governments. This has resulted in a very narrow picture of the circumstances and life situations of older people across the world. One difficulty with the reporting has probably been that the challenges relating to ageing and old age are very different in different parts of the world.

Good practices and working methods are very specific to national and local situations: it has not been possible to transfer them in their entirety to different contexts. We welcome the establishment by the United Nations of an Internet-accessible database on ageing that will make it possible to exchange information and good practices which will provide us with a wider global picture. The usefulness of this database will depend largely on the input from Governments.

At all levels, including local, national and international, long-term strategic work is necessary. Since population ageing as a global phenomenon will have a very strong impact on social development, we will have to mainstream ageing-related issues in our social and economic policies at all levels — including at the United Nations.

The European Union considers the 1982 International Plan of Action on Ageing a milestone in United Nations policy on ageing. There is, however, an obvious need to revise it to make it correspond to the needs of today. The European Union would address this need by supporting the idea of developing a new long-term strategy on ageing. This should be based on the experience gained within the implementation of the 1982 Plan. This kind of approach would also make it possible to review and reform the present reporting system in a way that would better serve the Member States and the international community.

The European Union believes that the holding of a global meeting in the year 2002 to review the outcome of the first World Assembly on Ageing — particularly the interrelationship between ageing and development — would contribute to the formulation of a new strategy on ageing, while maintaining the momentum created during the International Year of Older Persons.

To conclude, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his efforts to bring these issues to the global agenda during the International Year of Older Persons. Our sincere thanks also go to the Chairpersons of the Consultative Group for the International Year of Older Persons, Ambassador Julia Alvarez and Counsellor Aurelio Fernández.

Mr. Francese (Italy): My delegation feels very privileged, Mr. President, to take part in this morning's debate on the issue of the International Year of Older Persons and its follow-up under your wise and effective guidance.

Italy feels that we all owe a great debt of gratitude to the United Nations for its efforts on behalf of older persons. Over the past decade or so, the Organization has defined the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, produced the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, and proclaimed the special Year as a way of focusing attention on the theme "Towards a society for all ages". Making 1999 the occasion for international attention to older persons in the name of greater justice and solidarity is a fitting way to close the millennium.

Ageing is an issue of vital importance to the social policies of Italy, a nation that has one of the oldest populations in Europe and the world. In fact, our National Statistics Institute has forecast that by 2040 the percentage of the population that is over the age of 60 years will have increased by 39 per cent, and the percentage of those over 80 years of age by 9.3 per cent.

In addressing the issue of ageing, we must pay heed to a number of principles fundamental to the lives of older persons: independence, participation in society, provision of care, education and, finally, dignity. To implement them we need long-term strategies to recognize, appreciate and value older persons and their role in society. Italy has accepted this difficult challenge with determination and vigour.

For instance, in the Preparatory Commission of the International Criminal Court, Italy has drafted a proposal

to safeguard the older person. This is just one example of how raising matters in a number of international bodies can help to raise the standing of our senior citizens.

"Growing old well, growing old together" was the theme of the Italian Government's planning and allocation of resources on the occasion of the celebration of the International Year of Older Persons. The Italian people as a whole were mobilized through the National Committee for the Celebration of the International Year, expressly created and chaired by our Minister for Social Solidarity, The Honourable Livia Turco, who had originally planned to be here with us today but who was kept behind in Rome by a sudden parliamentary emergency. The Committee's members include representatives of several Government ministries, local and regional authorities and non-governmental organizations.

The national media helped launch an information campaign using advertising spots and television programmes on older persons in which various personalities participated. United Nations documentation on ageing was widely distributed, thanks to intense publication activity. In the spirit of article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty, a petition was circulated to amend article 3 of the Italian Constitution by introducing a clause to outlaw any form, direct or indirect, of age discrimination.

To raise public awareness of the issues of ageing and at the same time to listen to the emerging needs of civil society, the National Committee has sponsored initiatives throughout the country intended to leave a lasting effect in the coming years and decades. One major step was the conference entitled "Close-up on Old Age", held in Rome in May this year. The speakers included top leaders of the country, beginning with the Prime Minister, The Honourable Massimo D'Alema, who emphasized the Government's commitment to older persons. The purpose of the conference was twofold.

The first purpose was to announce the presentation to the Government of a draft law for the establishment and organization of a volunteer civilian service of older persons. This service would promote participatory, cooperative and responsible citizenship, while underscoring the many qualities that older persons have to offer after a lifetime of experience.

The second purpose was to receive contributions that would help lead to approval of the law on reforming the welfare system, currently being discussed in Parliament, aimed at creating an integrated system of actions and social services focusing on older persons. The reform is based on the fundamental notion that the older person must be considered a legal subject, and stresses the need to provide new, added economic subsidies to families living with older members. A key point of the reform is the need to expand social services to include better home services for older persons who are not self-sufficient.

The National Committee has further sponsored activities by local and regional authorities, associations and labour organizations. A number of conferences and seminars were held throughout the country to increase awareness of a fundamental need of contemporary society, that of creating a new generation of older persons that rejects a reductive view of old age as a state of medical dependence. The main issues they addressed include adult education, legal and social security, integrated systems of welfare and health actions and services, with a focus on Alzheimer's patients — some half a million persons in Italy are afflicted in old age by this illness — active ageing, empowerment, ageing and gender, and social security. Strong emphasis was placed on inter-generational solidarity through various projects aimed at promoting dialogue with young people. These lectures were accompanied by cultural and social events, in which many volunteer associations of older people participated.

One of the Committee's most noteworthy steps was its adoption and endorsement of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Declaration of the Responsibilities of Present Generations Towards Future Generations. Among the activities promoted by local and regional authorities, labour unions and non-governmental organizations were international and national conferences on the issues associated with ageing, ranging from broad cultural and social debates to more focused discussions of the specific economic, medical and psychological concerns of the elderly.

The Committee will wrap up its activities at the end of this celebratory Year with a "Show of Good Practices", an event involving 8,000 Italian municipalities. The Show, to be held in Catania next February, will aim to spread knowledge of activities to benefit older persons being carried out at the local level. It will also seek to prod our culture towards developing a social system that encourages the active citizenship of older persons, assures their well-being and provides support for persons with reduced independence. This is the kind of activity we have to carry out in coming years

so that our national policies aimed at enriching the lives of our senior citizens are made more and more effective.

In this spirit, Italy has sought to do its part to promote unity among different persons and institutions, restore meaning to the end of the millennium in this area and express solidarity with older people in Italy and throughout the world in this celebratory Year and beyond.

Ms. Bergmann (Germany): The current year has been declared the International Year of Older Persons. It is dedicated to the concerns of a special group within our population, older persons. However, the theme, "Towards a society for all ages", clearly demonstrates the need for all members of society to become involved.

In Germany, we have endeavoured to pursue concrete goals where possible — goals which are in close contact with the real circumstances in which people live. These include fostering citizens' social commitment and involvement as well as voluntary social work on the part of senior citizens; promoting quality assurance in assistance and care for older persons; strengthening the existing potential for solidarity among young and old alike; and promoting dialogue with politicians.

If we were to attempt a preliminary evaluation today, it would become clear that the conferences which have already been held and the projects and campaigns conducted, as well as the International Year, have been successful and have managed to draw the public's attention to this pressing topic. While the International Year of Older Persons has thus contributed to raising national and international awareness about population ageing, a society for all ages will require concrete steps. If we are to set the course for the societies and senior citizens of tomorrow and beyond, we need a new impetus and impulses which will take us beyond 1999 into the next millennium.

Let us recall once again the historic international conference on Ageing, held in Vienna in 1982, which adopted the International Plan of Action on Ageing. Its aim was to support Member States in formulating their national policies and programmes. One central message of the Plan of Action on Ageing was that older men and women should be enabled to make as comprehensive a contribution as possible to society.

A great deal has been achieved since then. The Vienna Plan of Action contributed, for example, to an increase in the attention given to the opportunities and challenges posed by ageing and related issues in many parts of the world. However, since the International Plan of Action on Ageing reflects the political, social and economic situation of 20 years past, the time has come to make a renewed effort to build on the achievements of the past and take account of the challenges now before us.

The demographic changes which have been occurring for a number of years now, not only in all of the countries of Europe but worldwide, have begun to dramatically change the landscape of our societies and urgently demand action by all responsible decision-makers.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, for instance, the proportion of those over the age of 60 will be twice that of those under the age of 15 in 30 years' time. Today, with the exception of Japan, the 25 countries with the highest proportion of citizens over the age of 65 are located in Europe. By the year 2030, the European Union will have to reckon with over 100 million senior citizens, of which some 20 million will be 80 and older.

At the same time, the ageing of populations has spread well beyond the industrialized world. The current growth rate of the elderly population in the developing countries is more than double that in developed countries. Percentages by themselves do not always give a sense of population ageing. In sub-Saharan Africa, between 1995 and 2015, the growth percentage-wise will be barely perceptible. The number of elderly people, however, will rise from 17 million to 29 million.

Lacking funds and unable to provide basic social services, developing countries struggle to come to terms with the growing numbers of elderly people. It has turned out to be a myth that families are always able to assume responsibility for the elderly. Being cared for by one's family often means sharing the family's poverty. The development process itself often causes stresses for families.

Productive ageing may in the end turn out to be a helpful concept for many countries. Moving ageing into the mainstream of national development agendas could be achieved by creating opportunities for older people to earn income while contributing to the growth of the economy. This requires a coordinated national effort and assistance from international governmental and non-governmental organizations. On the whole, more important than the quantitative changes are the qualitative

and structural changes which are connected with these demographic trends. These call for political action.

I therefore propose we now focus on the building of foundations for concrete policies and measures. The United Nations and all States have a key role to play to advance this global process, which aims to ensure that policymakers intervene wherever a new course can be set for the benefit of individuals in policies on health care, the labour market, education, cultural affairs and housing.

We at the United Nations should make a comprehensive attempt to adapt the nearly 20-year old Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing to the changed conditions and adjust it to meet the challenges of the future. I propose that to this end, the General Assembly decide to take appropriate steps so that the Commission for Social Development can take up this project.

Expert seminars could provide the technical foundation for a revised text which could be submitted to the Commission for Social Development for further deliberations in the year 2001. The Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Population and Development should also be involved in this endeavour, because they can contribute expertise on the issues of older women and overall population policies.

In the year 2002, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Vienna Plan of Action, it should be our aim to honour the work done in the past two decades and to adopt a new, second International Plan of Action on Ageing. I am confident that this proposal will have the overall support of Member States and observers in the United Nations. The Federal Republic of Germany is prepared to grant financial support for the preparatory work needed to revise the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

In this context, I would also like to recall that the Vienna Plan of Action envisaged work at the regional level. Since regions have different characteristics in terms of population ageing, greater use ought to be made of this possibility in the future. As a concrete first step in this direction, I would like to inform the Assembly that Germany is willing to hold a ministerial conference for the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region in Berlin in 2002, provided, of course, that the ECE members approve that proposal.

In conclusion, I would like to take the opportunity to draw the attention of the Assembly to a very extraordinary person. Ambassador Julia Alvarez of the Dominican Republic has been a staunch advocate of the senior citizens of this world over the past two decades. Her countless initiatives and her untiring efforts are testimony to one person's shining example of what a single individual can achieve for society. Her contribution to the promotion of policies for older persons has been and continues to be of inestimable value.

Ms. Alvarez (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of the Dominican Republic has the honour of addressing the General Assembly at its meeting dedicated to the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons. Much has changed since the World Assembly on Ageing, which was held in Vienna in 1982, when it was first acknowledged in an important international forum that the ageing of the population was not confined to the industrialized world but was actually going to have its greatest impact in our developing countries.

Initially, that change came slowly. The World Assembly on Ageing itself produced an International Plan of Action on Ageing, which focused more on humanitarian issues more than on the consequences of ageing for development. The Trust Fund for Ageing, which in 1982 contained $1 million, quickly and quietly disappeared, and the Plan of Action languished and lost all validity as a productive working instrument for the future. At the international conferences devoted to other subjects, older people continued to be included among other vulnerable groups. Despite the fact that the concept of productive aging continued in theory to be the desired objective, in practice it was rarely made concrete through new and fruitful initiatives.

A decade later, however, we had at least begun to face our future. We proclaimed 1 October as the International Day of Older Persons; we adopted the United Nations Principles for Older Persons; and, of course, in 1992 we declared that 1999 would be the International Year of Older Persons, with the theme, "A society for all ages".

In view of the fact that in the past United Nations activities on ageing have often been characterized by a gap between intention and action and between proclamations and effective projects, it has been heartening to see this revival of an awareness of the significance of population aging and the potential social role that older people can play — a revival brought about

in particular by the International Year of Older Persons, which is now drawing to a close.

The report of the Secretary General entitled "International Year of Older Persons, 1999: activities and legacies" summarizes and highlights selected activities in observance of the Year. It also analyses the impact of the Year on the direction and substantive content of the United Nations programme on ageing. We would like briefly to highlight some of the activities and accomplishments of our country in preparing for and celebrating the Year.

First of all, in September 1998, the Congress of the Dominican Republic drafted and approved a Code of Rights for Older Persons and established a national commission to oversee its enforcement. Older persons were consulted before the drafting of the document through the non-governmental organizations belonging to the Network for the Dignity of the Elderly, which also mobilized public opinion in support of the Code. We believe that concerted effort to protect and defend the rights of older persons was our greatest contribution to the International Year of Older Persons.

The Dominican Republic also became the first developing nation to work on the issue of ageing together with a group of developed nations, joining the United States, France, Japan and the United Kingdom in the creation in 1998 of the International Longevity Centre in the Dominican Republic, with its headquarters in Santo Domingo. That Centre is carrying out various intercultural studies and joint projects.

We have also celebrated the Year by exhibiting works of art and publishing poetry produced by elderly people, and we have organized competitions asking school children to describe how they see themselves after the age of 60. Furthermore, we have developed a community health programme to make elderly people aware of the need to take care of their own health.

With regard to promoting the concept of productive ageing, the support of the media has been invaluable in eliminating stereotypes and creating a positive attitude to ageing. As a developing nation, we do not have the luxury of considering older persons merely as a drain on our limited resources. We do not have the means necessary to pull them into the twenty-first century, but with goodwill, imagination and an openness to social innovation, we hope to move forward with them into the new world of ageing.

The International Year of Older Persons has shed light on and celebrated one of the most dramatic developments of our time. Increased life expectancy is producing something new under the sun: an alteration in the basic character of the human population of the Earth. It will so profoundly alter society that we run the danger of being left with institutions that were designed to deal with a world that no longer exists.

The challenges and opportunities presented by this unprecedented and uncharted era in human history are only now beginning to take shape. We live in the era of ageing, but we are only at the dawn of that era.

Whether our societies can rise to the occasion is not yet clear. We speak often of increased life expectancy, but not yet enough about what we can expect from that increased life. We anticipate that ageing populations will drain our resources, yet society allows older people to be eclipsed as vital, contributing members of their communities. We obsess about population statistics without sufficiently considering what all the numbers that constitute those statistics add up to.

If we are to add life to the years that have been added to life, and if we are to marshal all our potential resources to deal intelligently with this new social order, we need to understand the shape and the size of what confronts us. With older people looming larger in the statistical profiles of most countries, what will be or could be the nature of intergenerational ties in the future? What does increased longevity mean to people of all ages? What is the significance of the feminization of ageing? How can we formulate political and social strategies to deal with ageing that could also be adapted to economies in various stages of development? Of what has been tried so far, what works best, and why does it work?

The International Year of Older Persons has highlighted the potential of older people themselves to play a leading role in meeting these demographic challenges. Older people must be allowed and encouraged to see themselves as actors in the drama of their own lives and in their societies. They must be enabled to participate in the functioning of those societies as active, productive members, not as people who are passive and needy — who at best arouse pity and at worst are viewed as a burden. All of us must be fully aware that ability, not chronology, is the measure of how much people can contribute to society.

Focusing attention on a group by proclaiming a year in its honour is always a bit of a risk. When the International Year of Older Persons ends, will these people be discarded like a 1999 calendar? By 31 December 1999, if we have the will and the foresight to create a society for all ages, we will have gone beyond the calendar, certain, and proud, of having put older people on the map.

We are determined that for older people this time will be their time, that the clock will not run out with the calendar. We must ensure that the efforts made during the Year will not end when the clock strikes twelve on 31 December 1999. We thus welcome the idea of the Government of Germany to host a regional ministerial conference on ageing under the aegis of the Economic Commission for Europe in 2002 as a way to encourage regional follow-up initiatives. We hope that this will be emulated by other countries and other regions.

Finally, we want to underline a proposal that we feel will play a fundamental role in our overall plans for the future. Indeed, the generous offer by the Government of Spain to host a second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002 deserves our heartfelt gratitude and our sincere commitment to cooperate as much as we can for the success of the 2002 World Assembly.

Mr. Insanally (Guyana): In commemorating the International Year of Older Persons in 1999, the last year of the twentieth century and indeed of the second millennium, we cannot fail to recognize the important contribution which older persons have made to shaping the present century and, indeed, to shaping our civilization from time immemorial.

On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, some 133 countries in all, I take this opportunity to salute and thank them for the legacy they have bestowed on our younger generation as they prepare to face the challenges of the future. The accumulated wealth of experience and knowledge of today's elderly will undoubtedly provide tomorrow's adults with a solid foundation on which to build their own lives.

In this context, let me say a word of praise to Ambassador Julia Tavares de Alvarez of the Dominican Republic, one of our own, who has done so much single-handedly to advocate the cause of older persons.

Developing countries have long recognized the significance of an ageing population for their national development. In most of our societies, the old are treated with honour and respect. No wonder, then, that in 1992, when the Proclamation on Ageing was adopted by consensus by the General Assembly as resolution 47/5, the sponsors of that resolution were, significantly, the developing countries. That resolution built upon the outcome of the World Assembly on Ageing held in 1982 and on the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, which were adopted in 1991. Along with the Secretary-General's global targets on ageing, the programme of action sought to integrate national and international plans into a unified campaign to deal with the "greying" of the world's population. The Group of 77 today remains firmly committed to this comprehensive and cooperative approach.

For, while the problems of ageing have been more associated with developed rather than developing countries, perhaps because of lower fertility rates and mortality rates in the former, it is merely a matter of time before they are common to both. As we have heard, statistics show that by 2005 more than 70 per cent of all persons 60 years old and over will live in developing countries. The obligation to provide them with employment opportunities, improved health care, education and other social benefits will not be easily satisfied. The Governments of these countries, faced as many of them are with heavy debt burdens and severe structural adjustment programmes, will find it difficult if not impossible to bear the costs of adequate social measures. Hopefully, in the forthcoming reviews of the World Summit for Social Development and of the Fourth World Conference on Women we will have further opportunities to develop international cooperation to satisfy the needs of the elderly, who, as we know, constitute one of the most vulnerable sectors of our societies.

The life-cycle approach to development has now gained wide international acceptance. The 1992 Proclamation on Ageing observed that preparations for old age should begin in childhood and continue throughout life for the entire population. Such an approach could serve to integrate the concerns of the elderly into national development strategies and plans. Special attention will have to be given to older women, who have particular needs and who thus require programmes and policies that are sensitive to their situation. In too many cases, women are disadvantaged in terms of their access to education, housing, health care and employment. Their contributions to the economy and society are generally unrecognized and unappreciated. This is the case not only in the home but in the wider

community. Yet in Africa for example, where conflict and the HIV/AIDS virus prevail, the elderly are often forced to assume the role of head of the household when they themselves are in need of care.

It is thus incumbent on policy makers to take account of these factors in order to provide an enabling environment for older persons, particularly women, that would allow them to participate in the development process. In most developing countries, the family has traditionally been the source of support and care for the elderly. Today, however, the institution of the family is often undermined by such trends as migration, the AIDS pandemic, drug abuse and other socio-economic changes. Despite their constraints, Governments, must assume greater responsibilities for the nurture of the aged and protection of the family. However, they can succeed only if other stakeholders in society, including the private sector and community organizations, are willing to assist in sustaining social programmes for the elderly. In this context, the press and other media certainly have a role to play in enhancing public awareness of population ageing and the need to address the issue fully.

The Group of 77 and China calls for increased United Nations activities to address ageing in the context of development. Programmes in the areas of research, training and technical cooperation relating to ageing can contribute to a clearer understanding of available policy options and thereby assist national efforts to achieve global targets on ageing by the turn of the century. Adequate resources must therefore be provided to those United Nations agencies which are concerned with these social issues. At the same time, recognizing that the problems of development must be treated in a comprehensive and holistic fashion, the international community must agree on a closely knit strategy of cooperation aimed at creating better living conditions for all the world's people. Such a strategy would include increased official development assistance flows, debt reduction, investment and trade opportunities, employment and access to health, education and other social benefits, which would allow the disadvantaged societies of developing countries, including their elderly, to advance.

The Group of 77 and China firmly believes that with renewed effort and commitment, we can overcome the hurdles of injustice, inequality and marginalization which exist between and within our societies today. By joining hands and working together, we can truly hope to develop what the Secretary-General has called "a society for all ages".

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): I am indeed honoured to address this plenary meeting of the General Assembly on follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons, 1999, under the theme "Towards a society for all ages".

I would first like to express the Indonesian delegation's heartfelt appreciation to you, Mr. President, for your remarks delivered earlier. I should also like to associate my delegation with the statement just delivered by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77.

Before proceeding, let me express my appreciation to the Deputy Secretary-General for her insightful statement, and also the United Nations Secretariat for the considerable efforts that have gone into the observance of the International Year.

The implications of the ageing of our societies come as no surprise. Indeed, this issue that has been discussed at the United Nations and in many other forums over recent years. It was, thus, that the United Nations convened the World Assembly on Ageing in 1982, the same year in which this body adopted the International Plan of Action on Ageing. Nearly one decade later the continuing discussions on ageing resulted also in the adoption of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, and soon thereafter of the global targets on ageing for the year 2001. In fact, if I may recall, the International Plan of Action clearly states that the progressive ageing of our societies is neither an unexpected nor an unforeseeable event. It is, rather, a result of worldwide socio-economic development. The advances in science, medicine and technology in the past half century, and especially in the past decade, have greatly increased the average life expectancy, not only for the rich and privileged few, but also for the vast multitudes throughout the world. Global life expectancy has risen 20 years in only four decades. And as the war on disease, malnutrition and poverty continues, as longevity increases, we must rethink our concepts of old age and the challenges of this demographic shift. Not only must we prepare for the inevitable changes that will occur in employment structures, income security and health care, to name a few, but also to achieve the goals set forth in the United Nations Principles for Older Persons and a guarantee that longevity will be accompanied by dignity.

In this regard, the Indonesian delegation would like to welcome and commend the efforts that have been and are being made within the United Nations programme on ageing. The exploration of "wisdom" in a technology-

oriented world, as well as the "competitive advantage" of older persons in the new service-oriented economies, are important initiatives. This approach contributes to defining the role of older persons in society and the contribution they make, as well as addressing the essential question of mainstreaming ageing into social and economic policies and programmes. I would also add that Indonesia is encouraged by the ongoing formulation of a policy framework for a society for all ages, particularly within the context of the contributions to be made to national development.

The challenges ahead are truly complex and multidimensional. For we live in an age not only of increasing longevity, but also one in which the very dynamics of family life are being altered by economic reality. One manifestation of this is the increasing entrance into the workforce of traditional caregivers, which alters the presence of multigenerational support within the family. This, in turn, lends added importance to the need for income security and opportunities for older persons for a decent livelihood. Also, the particular situation of older women needs to be addressed and obstacles to their participation in social and economic development removed.

In my own country, Indonesia, we too have enjoyed the advances leading to increased life expectancy and improved quality of life. And while Indonesia is demographically a youthful society, we nevertheless appreciate fully the long-term implications that the ageing of our society will have for future social and economic policy. With less than 10 per cent of the population considered to be older persons and with a decreased population growth rate, we may anticipate a considerable demographic shift in the coming years.

Despite grappling with the consequences of the economic crisis that has engulfed Indonesia, along with other countries of the region, we remain committed to pursuing effective policies and programmes for older persons, consistent with the goal of society for all ages. In our society and our culture older persons have always been accorded a high degree of respect and deference. Our challenge is therefore to ensure that this attitude is not threatened by the vagaries of economics or the uncertainties of globalization. We need to move even further along the path towards ensuring that older persons fully enjoy independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity.

Among the activities that have been carried out for older persons within Indonesia is the celebration of a national day, in organizing a celebratory walk involving older persons and in other activities designed to draw attention to this International Year, including held under the theme "*Tua Berguna dan Berkualitas*", which means that older people still have a vital role to play and a contribution to make to national development. This day was proclaimed for the purpose of increasing awareness, improving the welfare of older persons, motivating society to solve problems faced by older persons and improving multi-sectoral cooperation in this effort. At the same time, Indonesia continues to maintain the concept of "three generations under one roof", or what is called more simply the extended family system.

Among other initiatives at the national level, Indonesia's Ministry of Social Affairs has been instrumental in the issuance of new stamps, in organizing a celebratory walk involving older persons and other activities designed to draw attention to this International Year, including the issuance of a brochure to further publicize the goal of the Year. With a limited budget and within the constraints imposed by the current financial situation, Indonesia remains active and effective in addressing this issue.

Let me conclude by noting that for developing countries — which are lacking in social-insurance and social-security systems and rely heavily on family support structures — ensuring the health and well-being of all the citizenry is a constant struggle, in view of our limited means for taking action. At the same time, I firmly believe that if we are to take anything from this International Year, it should be a new perception of older persons. They should not be viewed as the recipients of care or merely as a vulnerable group that must be protected, but as vital resources possessing a lifelong wealth of knowledge and lifelong experiences that should be fully employed in achieving a society for all.

Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to begin by thanking you, Mr. President, for your words of guidance at the opening of this meeting, and we also appreciate the important contribution made by the Deputy Secretary-General. We want to associate ourselves with the congratulations expressed to Ambassador Julia Alvarez for her important contribution to this issue. We also commend the work of the Group of 77 on this item.

We welcome the decision of the General Assembly to devote four meetings to the problems of older persons, and we believe that this provides a magnificent opportunity for our Organization to analyse with due care

the problems afflicting one of the most vulnerable segments of the population, whose quality of life — or lack thereof — is a representative of the growing disparities throughout our world between the industrialized countries and the third world and between the highest-income groups and the poorest.

The complacency with which the international community has thus far considered the problems of older people and all the surrounding issues has inevitably involved statistical fictions that attempt to show that tangible progress is being made. These statistics overlook the fact that there is another world, the world of the majority, which is not that of the industrialized countries and in which different, often subhuman conditions prevail. This situation needs to be tackled realistically and courageously and resolved efficiently and with solidarity.

The most recent report on global population indicates, in overall terms, that in the past 50 years the average life expectancy of the world's population as a whole has increased by approximately 20 years. The report proposes that, as a result, people in their sixties will make up 11.1 per cent of the total world population by the year 2010. However, we cannot fail to point out that this benefit will not come to everyone equally; nor can we accept passively the idea that the great majority of people in underdeveloped countries are doomed by massive, dire poverty, hunger, poor health and malnutrition not to be a part of these optimistic statistics — but, rather, to be included in the morbidity and mortality statistics characteristic of the less developed regions of the world.

The most illustrative example of this is perhaps the case of Africa. For our African brothers and sisters, average life expectancy at birth is 49 years for men and 51 for women, while in developed Europe the figure is 69 years for men and 77 for women.

How can higher levels be reached when on the African continent 23 million people are suffering from AIDS, when 172 boys and 154 girls out of every thousand are likely to die by the age of five, when infant mortality has reached the astronomical level of 91 children per one thousand live births?

How can we claim that overall statistics give a real picture of the situation in third world countries? What we should really be doing is comparing life expectancy and, above all, quality of life between countries. In African countries, for example, per capita gross domestic product in 1998 was a meagre $1,261, while in opulent Europe that same year, per capita gross domestic product was almost nine times as high: $10,189.

How can we compare the incomparable? In Africa health expenditures represent only 3.2 per cent of gross domestic product, while in Europe that figure is 7.1 per cent — and the gross domestic products of Africa and Europe are hardly comparable.

How could life expectancy at birth in third world countries approach that of the industrialized countries? In the former an astronomical 48 million people die of preventable diseases. In Africa the maternal mortality rate is 940 per 100,000 births, and in South-East Asia the figure is 610 per 100,000 while in Europe the rate is 59 per 100,000.

Another example comes from the 1998 mortality statistics reported by the World Health Organization. A total of 4,695,000 Africans died from infectious and parasitical diseases, including tuberculosis, while for Europeans the figure was only 234,000 — or one twentieth as many. This shameful inequality between developed countries and third world countries is the fundamental reason why only 8.5 per cent of the inhabitants of developing countries will be 60 or older in the year 2000, whereas 19.5 per cent of the population of developed countries — in other words, more than twice the proportion — will have reached that age.

In the majority of the countries of the underdeveloped world the basic concern is therefore not how to deal with all the various aspects of a boom in elderly people, but rather how to ensure that at least a small part of the population can actually reach that stage of life. This is the dilemma of some African countries, where it is painful to see poverty and AIDS, among other scourges, allowing only 3 per cent of their inhabitants to live past the age of 60, while in some European countries 24 per cent of the population is 60 or older.

Some 15 per cent of the populations of the United States and Europe live in so-called islands of poverty in the developed world, where there are amazingly low figures for life expectancy, in some cases similar to those of most third-world countries. Of course, this shocking reality does not mean that we minimize the role of this forum in steering the United Nations to the goal of working towards a well-deserved quality of life for older persons. We agree that this is a basic demand in a large part of the world, and that makes it a reasonable aspiration.

At the same time, however, we firmly believe that successfully meeting the challenge of guaranteeing a life expectancy of at least 60 years in all countries and a regularly declining rate of mortality is an aspiration of equally high priority. It is also essential to redefine, beyond rhetoric, the ways of ageing in order to give real meaning and dignity to the "quality of life" concept for older persons.

We must not fail to give serious and profound consideration to the lack of solidarity suffered by many older persons when family members, especially their children, shirk their responsibilities, and to the isolation, despair and loneliness in which a large number of these older persons must live. This phenomenon is having an ever increasing impact on opulent high-consumption societies.

The vulnerability and social neglect of older persons are especially clear in the segment of the population of industrialized countries that belongs to those islands of poverty. The best-known manifestation of this is the 600,000 homeless that, according to the United States Vice-President, lived in his country in 1997. The non-governmental organizations place that figure at 1 to 3 million people, a large proportion of whom are of the third age.

The follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons is of particular relevance to Cuba. Cuban society attaches the highest priority to this age group, especially at a time when the ageing of a population has become one of the great challenges to a country whose falling birth rate is complemented by a steady decline in mortality and where health services reach the entire population.

We therefore strongly defend the idea, reflected in Cuban social policy, that older persons need increasing opportunities and support systems in various areas and with greater urgency. This includes the generation of income, social security and comprehensive care. Satisfactory ageing is not just a legitimate aspiration of human beings, but also an indicator of development and good health.

In this respect, we were delighted by the successful convening of the GENTOVIDA '99 event, which concluded last Friday in Havana and included the third Latin American congress of the International Association of Gerontology and the second Ibero-American meeting of older persons. Specialists and older persons themselves made important contributions to the great endeavour of improving the quality of life of older persons and enhancing the gerontology culture.

For Cuba, the subject of older persons is of high priority. Currently, 13.6 per cent of the Cuban population — approximately 1.3 million inhabitants — is 60-years old or older. By the year 2025, it is forecast that one of every four Cubans will be over the age of 60. The reality of our population is the basic result of our Government's ongoing deep-seated social policy to guarantee universal and free health care, hospitalization and social security for all older persons. This is an important cause of the rise in life expectancy at birth to 75 years.

Among the programmes designed to improve health and social-care indicators for older persons is one for older adults that ensures special medical care to that broad segment of the population, as well as social care for older persons on their own. This is aimed at targeting sufficient attention to and promoting an independent life and full participation in social life for those who need society's support and care. Furthermore, pension expenditure is rising at an annual rate of 4.5 per cent, while the number of pensioners is increasing by 2.4 per cent a year. 12.6 per cent of our population benefits from this system. Cuba currently pays 1.3 million pensions for retirement, disability and death benefits.

We are also working to improve adult education, to create a university chair for the third age and to broaden the dissemination of information on the problems and concerns of that segment of our population. Given the foreseeable demand, we are already planning future training of the labour force and broadening medical and geriatric services.

There have been many obstacles to the development of this social policy. The economic war waged by the Government of the United States against Cuba, including the four-decade economic, financial and trade blockade that has intensified in recent years, has had a particularly negative impact on older persons, who form an especially vulnerable group, by limiting, *inter alia*, their consumption of the special food and medication they require.

We are aware that achieving the "society for all ages" advocated by the United Nations is a major challenge, particularly to the third-world countries, which often lack the resources to develop social programmes to improve the quality of life of the population in general

aid of older persons in particular, especially because of the application of structural adjustment policies, the impact of financial crises and the reduction of official development assistance. It is necessary for solidarity and cooperation to prevail so that mortality can decline, life expectancy rise and the population age with dignity in the developing countries.

In this respect, Cuba is prepared, as always, to contribute to this objective, of course without any consideration of economic benefit whatsoever. In one group of countries in Africa, a fraternal continent in great need, about 200 Cuban physicians are providing services. This figure will soon rise and does not include physicians working under contract, of whom there are 400 in South African villages. In the new programme of entirely free services that we are providing to the poorest countries of Africa with the most difficult health conditions, no fewer than 3,000 Cuban physicians are available to the inhabitants.

In Central America and the Caribbean, we are still developing our comprehensive health plan, through which 1,200 of our physicians and health-care specialists are providing care absolutely free.

The industrialized countries could cooperate by providing medication in the struggle to save and prolong life in these needy areas of the third world.

Furthermore, 2,000 students are training as physicians in the Latin American School of Medicine, an initiative aimed at providing better medical care in neighbouring countries. In coming months, the School will have 3,000 students, and 6,000 in three years. Similarly, we are promoting the establishment of medical schools with Cuban teachers to provide free training for health-care workers in the field in Africa.

May I conclude my statement by expressing my conviction that, in order to increase life expectancy, improve health-care indicators and the quality of social life, and successfully confront the very specific problems of older persons, it is crucial to have an international economic order that is just, fair and sustainable and makes it possible for these challenges to be met, regardless of the difficulty of surrounding circumstances.

Ms. Hönigsperger (Austria): Let me start by stressing that Austria fully endorses the statement which was delivered on this agenda item by the Presidency of the European Union.

The International Year of Older Persons has been and continues to be a welcome occasion for Austria to redirect and anchor its policy on older persons in the public consciousness in line with the United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

Austria defined the goals of the International Year of Older Persons at a very early stage, at the start of 1998, and established an Austrian National Committee to Prepare and Implement the International Year of Older Persons, chaired by the Federal Minister of Environment, Youth and Family Affairs. The Committee comprises all governmental and non-governmental institutions active in this field in order to achieve the widest possible participation.

In Austria, the core objectives in implementing the Year are defined as follows: appreciation of old age as an equal third life-cycle stage; encouragement of dialogue and interaction between the generations; active inclusion of older persons in society and politics; and the promotion of voluntary work by older persons through the establishment of community centres for these activities.

In implementing the International Year of Older Persons, Austria puts great emphasis on achieving maximum awareness and participation of its citizens, as well as on measures to foster and improve policies targeting older persons. The challenge of an ageing society is being addressed in more than a thousand events and initiatives. At the same time, targeted and sustained action is being taken at the political level. Let me highlight a number of these initiatives.

The International Year of Older Persons was launched in Austria on 1 October 1998 with the observation of the International Day of Older Persons. The day was guided by the motto "Dialogue between generations — action day for a better understanding between the generations". More than 300 events were organized on this Action Day throughout the country, ranging from counselling on free health care to platforms devoted to the dialogue between generations.

We also initiated several competitions aimed at the implementation of the goals of the Year. One competition, at the community level, awards projects and initiatives which encourage the implementation of the concept of solidarity between generations.

The Austrian State Award for Family-Oriented Journalism reflects the motto of the International Year: "Towards a society for all ages".

In April 1999, the Federal Ministry of Environment, Youth and Family Affairs and the Federal Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs jointly launched a competition evaluating long-term projects devoted to the issue of intergenerational dialogue. The competition targets students and youth organizations, as well as older persons who wish to interact with the young generation.

Within the scope of the Austrian National Committee, we also initiated seven working groups to develop and improve a comprehensive policy on older persons for my country, engaging more than 500 actors. It is their responsibility to analyse future challenges regarding the trend of an ageing society and to develop a sound basis for sustainable long-term programmes.

For the first time in Austria, a comprehensive scientific study on the situation of older persons was prepared this year. The findings of this study will guide our work in the future. The report provides concrete information on the housing situation, lifestyles, family networks, health care and societal participation of older persons in Austria. This initiative is based on the United Nations recommendation to study and analyse the situation of senior citizens. The first Austrian report on older persons will be submitted to the Austrian Parliament for discussion towards the end of the year.

One of our major concerns regarding the implementation of the goals defined by the International Year of Older Persons is appreciation for voluntary work. Older citizens should be offered opportunities and options for active and independent enjoyment of life at the third stage. Our model project of centres for voluntary work gives momentum to voluntary social activities at the community level. There is a lively demand for these platforms, which foster intergenerational dialogue. We will continue our efforts to develop a new culture of volunteers, including for the young population. This initiative should also be seen in the context of the International Year of Volunteers, which will be observed in 2001.

In order to enhance the participation of older persons in society, we launched an initiative at the local level which should open new opportunities for older persons to design their environment in an active manner. Local mayors and senior citizens are the target group for these activities aimed at the development of new modalities of representation for senior citizens.

In order to improve the protection and promotion of the rights of older persons, the Federal Ministry of Environment, Youth and Family Affairs appointed a Federal ombudsperson. This institution acts as a focal point for all legal concerns of older persons, giving special attention to the needs of senior citizens living in residences for the elderly.

As a preliminary resume of Austrian events and initiatives organized within the scope of the Year, we can distinguish the following trend: an ageing society is receiving increasing attention in the context of social policies in Austria. This achievement is complemented by an increase in reports by the Austrian media on issues related to older persons.

We have also been able to present convincing arguments for reorienting the paradigms of policies targeting older persons towards the United Nations Principles for Older Persons. In this regard, we take concrete action in redirecting the relevant Austrian policies through numerous measures that receive considerable attention from the public.

Austria would like to stress that the United Nations International Year of Older Persons has triggered a major momentum for a broad and in-depth discussion on the situation of older persons. We believe that the Year enhances opportunities for our senior citizens to participate in society and shapes the image of older persons in a positive way.

In this context, we wish to pay tribute to the dedication and determination of Ambassador Julia Alvarez, who made the Year a reality.

In following up on the results of International Year of Older Persons, we will continue to pursue these objectives, with a view to their sustained implementation.

Mr. Larraín (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): We celebrated the International Day of Older Persons on 1 October, and we reaffirmed our commitment to the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted in 1982 at the World Assembly on Ageing. That Plan of Action is a clear example of how an organized international community can contribute decisively to efficiently dealing with subjects which are the daily concern of our peoples.

Nonetheless, the vital momentum given to this subject by the United Nations would be of no significance without the effective commitment of national Governments to implement the recommendations of the Plan of Action. In this context, my Government is pleased to report that in 1990 Chile began a series of actions aimed at dealing systematically and comprehensively with the situation of older persons. In that year, the department of policies for priority groups set up, within the social division of the Ministry of Planning, to design a national strategy in this field. Following a diagnostic process, in 1993 the Chilean Government adopted a national ageing and old age policy and established the National Committee for the older adult, with its respective regional committees, with the aim of studying formulas for implementing that national policy. This process has become particularly important in our country because the analysis of demographic trends and projections shows characteristics of an advanced stage of demographic transition, a stage in which Chile finds itself. Beginning with the period 1995-2000, these characteristics translate into a decrease in natural annual population growth, together with the continued ageing of the population already begun in earlier decades. Statistics also show that the ageing trend has a more marked impact on the female population, especially in rural areas of our country.

That makes even more urgent the need indicated in the Equal Opportunity Plan for Chilean Women 1994-1999 to formulate policies and programmes having regard to the specific circumstances of older women. Those circumstances include the metabolic degenerative problems peculiar to women's biology and psychological problems stemming from lack of social recognition, such as the fact that a higher proportion of older women are poor and heads of household, or have a dependent status.

Specific women's programmes go hand in hand with special programmes to increase and improve services for older persons who are poor and to encourage them to take part in social life. As a result, in the decade now drawing to a close Chile has reduced the proportion of over-60s living in poverty from 20.4 per cent to 10 per cent.

Among the programmes that we have established we can highlight the following.

With regard to health, there are five ongoing programmes to resolve the nutrition, education and self-care problems of the elderly and to provide education for a healthy life.

In the area of housing, there are programmes to rehabilitate dwellings for poor older people and meet basic housing needs.

On social development, 13 programmes are being implemented to improve the living conditions of the older population. In this sphere, the Solidarity and Social Investment Fund has since 1996 developed a programme entitled "More life for your years", which is aimed at poor persons over 65. This programme in turn has two components. The first, called "Services for the older person", is to provide services at the community level and facilitate access to existing public services within and outside the community level. The second makes available to organizations of older persons small funds, for which competitive application must be made, to implement their own initiatives.

In the area of education and training, there have been programmes geared to the cultural recreation of older persons and to training in written and oral skills.

Lastly, I would like to place on record that the beginning of the International Year of Older Persons was celebrated in Chile with the convening of a fourth large gathering of older persons, a three-day event, with the theme "Living life". In addition, 1 October has been officially designated the Day of the Older Person, and the whole of October has been designated the Month of the Older Person.

Furthermore, the theme of the International Year, "Towards a society for all ages", has been interpreted by my country as an invitation to work for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against older persons in our society. Thus, the main objective of our national policy for the older person is to achieve a cultural change resulting in better treatment of older persons. This is an endeavour involving all social actors in the country.

I have given a brief account of the concrete actions being taken by the Chilean Government to improve the living conditions of older persons, honouring the commitment solemnly made in Vienna 18 years ago. In this respect, the Chilean Government considers it essential to continue the work of our Organization on the subject of ageing, work which is being efficiently guided by the Secretariat in the right direction.

We will soon be celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, and the Government of Chile believes that on

that occasion — in 2002 — the international community will have to meet to analyse the progress made and set long-term guidelines and strategies for the coming years, years which, demographic trends indicate, will be characterized by a continuous ageing of our population.

Mr. Maravall (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): While fully supporting the statement made today by Finland on behalf of the European Union, my delegation wishes to make this additional statement to share our national experience regarding the International Year of Older Persons and the activities needed for its satisfactory follow-up.

In Spain the International Year was a decisive catalyst for greater attention by our society to the situation of older persons and questions related to ageing. It also generated many activities, debates and proposals which we consider to be of great interest and to which I will briefly refer.

It is also important to point out that the International Year significantly promoted the associations of older persons movement in Spain, especially through the State Council of Older Persons.

As we reported last February during the meeting of the Commission for Social Development, at the end of 1997 we established the National Coordination Committee for the International Year of Older Persons. This Committee, presided over by the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, includes all the non-governmental organizations represented on the State Council of Older Persons; representatives of each of the 17 Regional Councils of Older Persons; representatives of non-governmental organizations of a general nature; representatives of universities, foundations linked to major corporations and financial entities; and lastly, representatives of State, regional and local government. At the beginning of this year, coinciding with the beginning of the International Year, the Committee started a programme of activities for the Year which eventually amounted to more than a thousand celebrations and activities related to the International Year at all levels, from local to national, including autonomous communities.

The national activities, in addition to a publicity campaign on the International Year and other measures to publicize it, included a campaign to promote volunteer activities by older persons and an evaluation of the National Gerontology Plan, an integrated part of our policy for older persons, adopted in 1991 for the decade. This evaluation showed both positive aspects and important achievements, but also considerable shortcomings, which we are working on to rectify them in a new plan.

Among the advances made during this period, we would highlight the following: the universalization and improvement of public pensions; improvements in preventive health and hygiene programmes; a considerable growth in residential care provision for older persons, help provided at home and from outside; the development of quality of life programmes; subsidized travel and health spa visits, as well as transport adapted to their needs and the removal of barriers to mobility in buildings; the establishment of programmes for older persons in many universities; and a significant change in the public image of older persons, in particular attitudes of and towards older women.

As regards the shortcomings, three fields are under particular consideration: the priority that should be given to caring for dependent older persons, especially victims of Alzheimer's disease and other dementia; the need to promote flexible and diversified programmes to support families caring for older persons; and the need to promote comprehensive social welfare and health programmes.

I should like to mention another aspect relating to our social security system. Ways of making retirement more flexible, better adapted to the new realities of older persons, are also on the agenda of our national debate, to which the International Year has contributed new and interesting perspectives. It must be said that the attitudes of older persons towards ageing and of society towards older persons, has changed; today a 65-year-old person in Spain cannot in general be considered elderly, inactive or sick. If to this we add a considerable rise in life expectancy — approximately 80 years on average in our country, particularly for women — we can easily understand the need to adapt our legislation on retirement to these changes, promoting more flexible formulas in our social security system.

Within our national experience, I would highlight an important agreement that was signed two weeks ago between the Spanish Government and the unions on an increase and improvement in pensions. I would highlight also that Spain has promoted a master's degree course in social gerontology in Brazil for Ibero-American professionals and has co-funded the Congress of Networks of Older Adults in Argentina.

Although the International Year of Older Persons will not come to an end until December, we can already say that it has more than amply lived up to the initial expectations. The International Year has generated considerable interest in ageing-related issues and the situation of older persons by giving these subjects a new dimension in which the fundamental approach does not focus on dependency but rather on the potential of older persons as active agents for development in our societies. We are attempting to formalize this concept around the expression "active and healthy ageing".

In its resolution 37/2, the Commission for Social Development requested the Secretary-General to solicit the opinions of States, non-governmental organizations and the private sector on updating the International Plan of Action on Ageing and on the desirability and feasibility of convening in the year 2002 a review of the outcome of the World Assembly on Ageing including the interrelationship of ageing and development. This consultation, which concerns various steps to be taken in the next few years to provide proper follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons is, we believe, very opportune.

More specifically, in response to the questions posed in resolution 37/2, I wish first of all to reiterate that Spain is in favour of convening in the year 2002, a global conference to review the results of the first World Assembly on Ageing in Vienna 1982. We believe that this gathering in 2002, which could be called the Second World Assembly on Ageing, should be a basic element in International Year follow-up activities. It should enable us to formulate a long-term strategy on ageing taking into account the most recent trends in the ageing process in our society, and their implications; in this, the concept of a society for all ages must be the touchstone.

We also believe that the interrelations between ageing and development — as the Commission for Social Development rightly pointed out — must be fully explored, and in this respect we believe that a Second World Assembly on Ageing should pay particular attention to the problems of ageing in the developing countries. These problems are not the exclusive concern of those countries alone; they are also matters of global interest.

In the light of all these considerations, it also seems to us that work should begin on updating the International Plan of Action on Ageing. The results of the updating process — which would fall to the Commission for Social Development to carry out — would also bring us to a global meeting in 2002.

For all these reasons, and bearing in mind that ageing-related issues and policies for older persons are priority considerations in our country, Spain has expressed its desire, if there is a consensus on convening the Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002, to offer itself as host. This offer was included in the statement by our Minister for Foreign Affairs in the general debate, and we reaffirm it now.

Lastly, Spain believes that greater global attention must be given to ageing-related issues in the various international forums. We should be aware that we are talking about an issue that mainly affected the developing countries when the International Plan of Action on Ageing was adopted in 1982, but is increasingly becoming a concern for all countries. These considerations are also behind our offer to host the meeting in 2002. We hope that there will soon be a consensus decision to accept our offer.

Mr. Nuanthasing (Lao People's Democratic Republic): Population ageing has not become one of the world's more alarming issues, and, if not properly dealt with, the problem over the next century could be worse. According to United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) demographic data, the number of older persons aged 60 or over is estimated at nearly 600 million this year — 1999 — and is projected to grow to 1.9 billion by 2050, when the number of older persons will be as large as the number of children in the world.

In 1982, the World Assembly on Ageing convened by the United Nations adopted an International Plan of Action on Ageing. Furthermore, at its forty-sixth session, the General Assembly adopted the United Nations Principles for Older Persons (resolution 46/91, annex). As a basis for formulating national policies on ageing, the International Plan of Action and the United Nations Principles set a series of objectives and targets for the world community to achieve in dealing with this issue.

Both the International Plan of Action on Ageing and the United Nations Principles for Older Persons have been accepted by Member States as general guidelines for national actions. However, different countries have different ways of meeting the targets outlined in the International Plan of Action based on their economic, social, cultural and religious realities. In the case of Laos, our society advocates strong family ties. According to our culture and tradition, the family has the primary responsibility to take care of its older members. By this we do not mean that the Government has no

responsibility for older persons: on the contrary, as a matter of policy the Government is doing everything humanly possible to help families take care of their own older persons.

Ministries, provincial and district authorities and other Government bodies are also obliged to take care of their retired and older people. The Government has provided Ministries and provincial authorities with funds to build retirement communities. In other cases, the Government assists older people by supplying construction materials which they can use to build their houses as they wish. The national pension is another source of income for older people, and in public hospitals, older people also receive medical treatment free or at reduced cost. Many achievements have been made, but much remains to be done; the Government is determined to take further steps to enhance the quality of life of older persons.

In preparation for the observance of the International Year of Older Persons, a national committee was established. The Committee is composed of Government agencies — the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Public Health — and the Lao Women's Union, the Lao Front for National Construction and the National Retirement Club.

In celebration of the International Year, in Vientiane the Committee has organized seminars, conferences and training courses for trainers in caring for the elderly. At the beginning of the year, a campaign of medical checkups for older people was conducted in many cities around the country. Also a meeting and peace walk in honour of older persons, concerts and sporting events, handicraft exhibitions and shows of traditional Lao fashions were included in the programme organized this year in the capital city, Vientiane, and in many provincial cities. All these activities are aimed at raising public awareness of ageing issues under the theme "Towards a society for all ages". Through these events we very much hope to strengthen the inter-generational relationship in our society.

The celebration of the International Year of Older Persons this year provides a good opportunity for the Member States to cooperate closely with the United Nations system, to exchange experiences and to take home relevant ideas and policies which can be realized in their home countries. It is my delegation's hope that the outcome of our two-day debate will contribute to efforts to formulate an action-oriented strategy on ageing for the new millennium. In this spirit, all countries the world over should unite their efforts and find effective ways to build a true society for all ages, a society that all people, including older persons, can benefit from.

Mr. Satoh (Japan): At the outset, I would like to commend you, Mr. President, for providing us with an important opportunity to follow up the International Year of Older Persons. I would also like to join in expressing sincere appreciation to Ambassador Alvarez of the Dominican Republic, who played a major part in the effort to put the issue of older persons on the international agenda.

We are pleased to be able to celebrate the International Year of Older Persons in this last year before the new millennium. The theme of the Year, "Towards a society for all ages," underscores the importance of strengthening solidarity between human beings of every generation, and this valuable idea will have to be further mainstreamed in the new millennium.

As is often stressed, if the elderly are well cared for and empowered in the process of ageing, this could provide a broad range of opportunities, both in individuals' lives and for society. The unprecedented increase in longevity, together with technological innovation and globalization, would make it possible for us to realize "active ageing", in which older persons participate in a wide range of domestic as well as international activities. This would lead us to the realization of a true "society for all ages".

What we have to do now and in the coming years is to maximize our efforts both in advancing the empowerment of older persons and in increasing opportunities for older persons to participate. Needless to say, caring for older persons must be a central part of this concept of a "society for all ages".

While Governments, central as well as local, must take leadership in these efforts, the roles to be played by civil society and volunteers as well as the media are essential for the success of this endeavour. Networking and partnership among these players and cooperation between them and Governments are critically important in order to realize a "society for all ages".

Ageing is an issue of increasing importance to Japan. Our society is ageing at an unprecedented speed, faster than any other in the world. Today one out of six Japanese is 65 or older, and it is expected that in 2050 one third of the population will be 65 or older. And in social environments wherein parents and younger couples

live separately, caring for older persons is a matter that must be addressed by society as a whole.

In order to cope with this issue, the Japanese Parliament enacted in 1995 the Basic Law on Measures for an Ageing Society, which provides for necessary measures to be taken, with independence and solidarity as guiding principles. Obviously, this reflects the United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

In order to achieve the purpose of this law, the Government of Japan is now working to strengthen partnerships with local Governments and non-governmental organizations. The Japan Non-Governmental Organization Conference was also established in October last year for the purpose of promoting cooperation among non-governmental organizations engaged in activities related to ageing. In addition, numerous events have been held by concerned organizations as well as by many local Governments during this International Year of Older Persons.

The Japanese Government is also working to create a new social security system of long-term care insurance which is aimed at ensuring the necessary services for those who require long-term care.

Internationally, the then Japanese Prime Minister, Ryutaro Hashimoto, proposed the "Initiative for a Caring World" at the G-7 Lyon summit in 1996, with a view to promoting the concept of "active ageing". Subsequently, Japan convened a series of conferences, including the East Asian Ministerial Meeting on Caring Societies, held in December 1997, and a meeting of high-level officials, held in January last year. Japan also sponsored in April last year an international symposium entitled "Health Initiatives in the Asian Economic Crisis" in order to help alleviate the negative impacts the East Asian financial crisis had caused on health care in the countries involved. This was in addition to the financial support Japan had provided to the countries hit by the financial crisis.

Japan also provides training to officials from developing countries who are responsible for the administration of social security systems. In September this year, Japan held an international symposium on "active ageing" in Tokyo.

Increased efforts by us all are required in order for us to attain the goal of realizing a "society for all ages". As pointed out by the Secretary-General in his report, we have to pursue this goal from a multidimensional perspective, taking into account not only the situation of older persons but also life-long individual development, multigenerational relationships and the interplay of population ageing and development. In this context, my delegation welcomes the ongoing effort by the Secretariat to prepare a long-term strategy on ageing, which will be discussed at the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly.

Japan, for its part, is advocating that the international community devote greater attention to human security as we enter the next millennium. By human security, we mean protecting human beings' safety and dignity from all sorts of threats, ranging from poverty, conflict and climate change to drugs and infectious diseases. Older persons, who are vulnerable to each one of these threats, must be the primary beneficiaries of this policy approach that we are advocating.

In recognizing this, I would like to reaffirm the determination of the Japanese Government to do its utmost to create a society for all ages, both nationally and internationally.

Mr. Chaouachi (Tunisia) (*spoke in French*): Tunisia is happy to join the international community today in celebrating the International Year of Older Persons. My country welcomes the fact that 1999 — the last year of the century — is being celebrated under the banner of social solidarity to promote a society for all ages. This year is a milestone in making all the nations of the world aware of the importance of the phenomenon of the ageing of the population. Tunisia associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77.

The profound economic and social changes that have taken place in the world during this century, and the progress made in science and technology, particularly in the medical field, have had beneficial effects, improving people's lives and, in the past 50 years, increasing life expectancy by 20 years.

Such longevity is new terrain for humanity, and we must all explore and discover it together. We must prepare ourselves to confront this new challenge so that we can promote good living conditions for older people.

In this context, the 1982 Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing and resolution 46/91 of 16 December 1991, which set out the Principles of the

United Nations aimed at enabling older people better to enjoy their extended years, remain the preferred point of reference for guiding our policies and actions in this area. We must ensure independence for older people, guarantee their full participation in social activities, provide for their needs and foster their personal growth while preserving their dignity.

Tunisia would like to emphasize the existing link between ageing and development. We believe that it is difficult to guarantee older people a tranquil old age in societies that are suffering from poverty and that, in addition, are being ravaged by armed conflicts and natural disasters. In this respect, Tunisia calls for international solidarity so as to put an end to the existing disparities between the rich and poor countries, between those with sufficient resources to provide their citizens with a happy old age and enough to live on, and those whose meagre resources are insufficient to meet adequately the many needs of their people, especially the elderly.

In order to strengthen the bonds of solidarity, the President of the Republic of Tunisia, Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali has proposed to the international community the creation of a world solidarity fund, which would collect voluntary contributions for development projects in the poorest regions.

Tunisia's social policy gives priority to older persons. Such an attitude is not new, and stems from the fundamental values that underpin our social fabric. Indeed, in our society, as in many others, older people have always been an invaluable resource to whom families and society as a whole pledge respect, love and affection. That attitude was consolidated by law number 94-114 of 31 October 1994, on the protection of older persons, which is a bill of rights for older people. It is designed to strengthen family solidarity and home care for such individuals, improve institutional assistance to them and provide them with necessary health-care coverage.

My country has implemented a strategy for the protection of older people based on, first, ensuring social support through security funds; second, providing material assistance at home for those in need; third, providing material assistance for families that take in older persons in need who lack family support; fourth, creating mobile, multidisciplinary teams to provide home medical care for older people; fifth, implementing a programme to improve conditions for taking care of and protecting older people in centres for the elderly; sixth, free treatment and hospital care in public health institutions for all older people in need; seventh, arranging for the creation and running of private facilities for the protection of the elderly; and, eighth, setting up medical-school diploma courses in geriatrics.

In the framework of its ninth economic and social development plan, which is currently in effect, Tunisia has also set out a strategy to protect older persons. This consists of consolidating the activities of associations working with the elderly, strengthening work in the specialized medical and paramedical areas, validating the role of older people by benefiting from their experience and knowledge and providing permanent assistance to 3,100 vulnerable older people in the context of the national programme for the protection of older people.

Mr. Pennekamp (Netherlands): The Netherlands fully supports the statement made by the European Union (EU) Presidency. Allow me to make a national statement as a complement to that statement.

On the eve of the twenty-first century, great changes are taking place throughout the world. Globalization, technological advances and an ageing population affect us all. The common factor in all of these changes is that they have an impact on our economic, social and cultural structure. By 2020, we expect there to be 1 billion older people in the world, 700 million of them in developing countries. But how will they — perhaps I should say, "we" — live? What will they live on? Who will look after them? And how can we stop many of them from becoming marginalized and excluded?

As we look at the economic and social developments in the world, the issue of a policy for older people has everything to do with their opportunities for social integration, participation and independence. Of course, a country can deliver only the social welfare system it can afford. I agree with the World Bank that there is no standard recipe. Little can be achieved without work, a secure income, adequate housing and good health. None of those elements can exist without certain financial and economic conditions.

In the Netherlands, we have shown that market-based economic policies and comprehensive social welfare policies can coexist successfully and that they are in fact two sides of the same coin. If people of all ages are to be active members of society, we have to invest in an affordable pension system, housing, social welfare and a health-care system.

A competitive world does not have to be a world of growing inequality, social instability, and structural unemployment. Dutch policy demonstrates this clearly. Like many other countries, we have to cope with social problems that primarily affect the more vulnerable groups in society, such as the frail and the very old. Fewer than half of the very old live in homes for the elderly; of those over 65, only 8 per cent reside in a home for the elderly or a nursing home. In our policy, living independently is far more important than institutionalized care. Nevertheless, people's everyday problems demand specific remedies which, in the Netherlands at least, have to be delivered at the local or regional level.

Those who are in need of care or adapted housing are enabled to live independently thanks to well coordinated services such as home care and adapted housing, or to volunteers and informal care. All this entails a crucial role for local authorities, local services and citizens in the area — of course, including older people themselves. In a society for all ages, people have to be able to participate fully, and should not have to not face discrimination or other barriers to obtaining work, income, housing or care. No one should be excluded from society because of discrimination on the grounds of age, handicap or any other ground.

Age discrimination is the focus of much attention in the Netherlands. At the national level, we do everything possible to fight it, for instance by supporting such organizations as the National Bureau against Age Discrimination, and by setting non-discrimination as a condition for financial support in fields such as sports.

A society for all ages is all about people, both as individuals and in groups. It is a society that encourages human achievement and promotes both social and economic participation and integration. To sustain a society for all ages, we have to make long-term investments in our human capital. In the technology-based society of the future, education and the notion of life-long learning will be prime conditions for participation, for both young and old. To give an example, one of the high points of the International Year of Older Persons in the Netherlands was Generations Day, held on the first day of summer. This was a chance for young and old to meet, exchange thoughts and work together.

But the Netherlands Government is not concerned merely with what goes on within our own national borders. Population ageing is a worldwide phenomenon that has long affected more than the industrialized countries. In many developing countries, the standard of living has improved greatly, thanks mainly to the efforts of older people themselves. More people than ever are now living in peace and prosperity. Fewer children are dying; more people are surviving into old age; and women now have more say about how many children they will bear. These are all benefits of sustained social and economic development. However, we cannot deny the potential gravity of the economic, financial and social impact of an ageing world population. Solutions are not easy to come up with. Some people regard this as one of the greatest challenges likely to face us in the first century of the new millennium, especially in the many developing countries where the proportion of older people is growing much faster than in the industrialized countries. In those countries, growing old usually means growing old and poor; only a few older people have access to social welfare, and traditional family-based care for the old is steadily being eroded.

Even in a highly developed social welfare system such as that in our country, we still need traditional informal care. This is exemplified by the large number of volunteers and informal care-givers active in this field. And since older people will continue to suffer from failing health, we have to focus on providing them, earlier in life, with advice, preventive care, health education and, most of all, access to basic medical services. Inspired by the International Year of Older Persons, my ministry, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have submitted a joint memorandum to the Dutch Parliament entitled "Ageing and Development". That document, summaries of which my delegation has made available to members, aims to draw attention to the ageing of the world's population and its impact on developing countries. And it underscores the prime objective of international policy on older people: their full participation and integration in society. Regard for older people — and especially for the strengths, experience and contributions that the elderly can give to society — should be an essential part of our policy. That is why the Dutch Government considers it important that we learn from each other how to encourage people to stay active in later life.

Learning from each other's policies and best practices is potentially a very useful instrument. To make it work, the Netherlands Government is funding a United Nations database, accessible on the Internet, containing information and public responses to population and ageing policy issues in different areas. The annex to the

written version of my speech provides details on how to access the database, which is at present under construction, along with a sample of its content. I am fully confident that together we will make a success of it.

Ultimately it is not primarily for Governments but for people themselves to shape this society which we have come to call during the past thematic year a society for all ages. The future is in their hands; unless people, young and old, have a chance to be active members of society, there is a real danger that their commitment will be stifled and that their valuable contribution to building a better society will be lost.

Ms. Wilson (Canada): Canada welcomes the opportunity to present a summary of Canada's record in relation to the International Year of Older Persons. We congratulate the Secretary-General on highlighting a variety of activities undertaken by Governments and by civil society, which provide useful examples for all of us. As well, his report sets out in a comprehensive way key markers for future activities of the United Nations programme on ageing, offering useful guidance and challenging ideas for future consideration. We also thank those individuals and Governments that contributed to the expert consultation and report.

Like other rapidly ageing societies, Canada has an important stake in the International Year of Older Persons. Our senior population, which today makes up 12 per cent of Canada's total population, will account for close to 25 per cent of all Canadians by 2041. The International Year of Older Persons has cast the spotlight on the challenges and opportunities of an ageing Canadian society. The policy initiatives undertaken by Canada this year are part of a broad, ongoing and forward-looking agenda begun several years ago. That agenda builds on Canada's strong social programmes, which include a multi-pillared retirement income system and a national health insurance programme accessible to Canadians of all ages.

Two years ago, Canada introduced reforms to the Canada pension plan that assure its fairness across generations and its financial sustainability for the future, while keeping benefits to pensioners fundamentally intact. In February 1999, Canada was able to devote new resources to the health sector. Initiatives were introduced to strengthen health services and to improve the readiness of the health system for an ageing population. Important investments have been made to enhance the quality and accessibility of health services, to encourage the development and application of new technologies in health and to stimulate research on key health concerns.

To respond to the challenges of ageing, the federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for seniors have agreed on a national framework on ageing to guide all jurisdictions and sectors in the development of policies, programmes and services for seniors. As part of this work, ministers approved a set of core policy principles which were inspired by the United Nations Principles for Older Persons and which were endorsed by seniors in consultations across the country. These Canadian policy principles are: dignity, independence, participation, fairness and security.

Canada's International Year of Older Persons efforts got under way last year when our federal, provincial and territorial Ministers responsible for seniors established a special body — the Canada Coordinating Committee for the International Year of Older Persons — to oversee the planning and implementation of initiatives across the country. The Committee included members from every province and territory, representing a broad spectrum of society, including aboriginal persons and persons with disabilities.

Among the many initiatives undertaken this year, Canada was pleased to host the Fourth Global Conference of the International Federation on Ageing, which took place last month in Montreal. This conference was the largest ever, with representation from 60 nations, including ministers with portfolios dealing with ageing, or seniors, from 30 countries. The Montreal Declaration emerged from this conference. The Declaration reviews the status of older persons around the world and reaffirms the 1991 United Nations Principles for Older Persons. It also calls on the United Nations to continue the momentum generated by the International Year of Older Persons.

Throughout 1999 Canadians young and old have worked together on events, projects and celebrations that are helping to establish a legacy of inter-generational understanding. Some of these will continue. For example, the Generations CAN Connect project intends to build bridges between seniors and youth using information and communication technologies, including the involvement of youth interviewing seniors about significant memories and posting them on the Internet.

The thrust of Canada's public policy for an ageing society is to ensure that our social programmes are

sustainable and fair, and to promote good health throughout the life course for all Canadians. We know that we need to devote greater attention to reducing the disparities in health and well-being affecting certain groups in our older population, such as seniors with low incomes, older women living alone and aboriginal seniors.

(*spoke in French*)

Our country's challenge for the remainder of 1999 and beyond is to build on the momentum of the past nine months to ensure that the legacy of the International Year of Older Persons is a strong and enduring one.

The President: We have heard the last speaker for this meeting.

I should like to remind Members that, as announced earlier at this meeting, statements for these four plenary meetings should not exceed 10 minutes. In view of the large number of speakers on the list, I strongly urge speakers to adhere to the 10-minute guideline.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.